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ABSTRACT

A telephone poll of 91 University of Maryland students was conducted to determine the nature and extent of their interest in women's studies courses. Results indicated that 86 percent felt there was a need for such courses and 57 percent would take such a course. Women (73 percent) were more interested than men (38 percent) in taking such courses, and Arts and Sciences students were most interested (65 percent) and Agriculture students least interested (0 percent). Students were most in favor of a major in women's studies (54 percent in favor) as opposed to having a separate department of women's studies (58 percent opposed), and 59 percent felt that individual departments should offer courses on women. Students were most interested (in descending order) in courses on: Sociology of Women, Psychology of Women, Sex and Politics, Biology of Women, Women in Literature, History of Women, and Women in Education. Women were more interested in the Psychology of Women than the Sociology of Women, while men were the opposite. Results of this survey suggest that steps ought to be taken at the University of Maryland to implement a women's studies curriculum. Students surveyed were overwhelmingly in favor of such an undertaking and there are large numbers of faculty members interested and willing to teach courses in some area relevant to their interests and to women's studies. Statistical data are included. (Author/LBH)

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STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE NEED FOR A WOMEN'S STUDIES PROGRAM

Michele H. Herman & William E. Sedlacek

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SUMMARY

A telephone poll of 91 University of Maryland students was conducted to determine the nature and extent of their interest in women's studies courses. Results indicated that 86% felt there was a need for such courses and 57% would take such a course. Women (73%) were more interested than men (38%) in taking such courses, and Arts and Sciences students were most interested (65%) and Agriculture students least interested (0%). Students were most in favor of a major in women's studies (54% in favor) as opposed to having a separate department of women's studies (58% opposed), and 59% felt that individual departments should offer courses on women. Students were most interested (in descending order) in courses on: Sociology of Women, Psychology of Women, Sex and Politics, Biology of Women, Women in Literature, History of Women and Women in Education. Women were more interested in the Psychology of Women than the Sociology of Women, while men were the opposite.

There is no doubt from the results of this survey, that steps ought to be taken at the University of Maryland to implement a women's studies curriculum. Students surveyed were overwhelmingly in favor of such an undertaking. There are large numbers of faculty members interested and willing to teach courses in some area relevant to their interests and to women's studies. Introducing such a program would involve little financial expenditure other than financing a coordinator for the program. It could easily be done, and should be, but will it?

Many colleges and universities across the nation are presently considering whether to add courses on women to their curriculum. Changes have been called for (Truex, 1970) and a few universities have already developed complete women's studies curricula, (e.g., Radcliffe, University of Michigan). Many others have profited from the addition to their curriculum of one or more courses on women. Women's studies courses are being offered at 21 Canadian colleges (Chronicle of Higher Education, 1972). Courses in the U.S. and Canada range from a history of women, to courses on the psychology of women, to women in literature. Some may question the advisability of establishing a curriculum uniquely geared to women's studies. It could be argued that women have been studied as diligently as men, but in point of fact, to the extent that women are different or that they have potentialities of their own, they have been ignored. Courses in the past, although they were meant to be asexual, dealt with the prime movers, which for cultural reasons, happened to be seen as men. For this reason, it is important to develop a comprehensive curriculum of women's studies courses.

At the University of Maryland there have been few courses on women. In the spring semester of 1972, fewer than 25 courses were taught, which to any degree dealt with women. Also, these are largely experimental and have yet to be incorporated into the traditional curriculum. Many departments are resistant to change and hesitant to teach courses on women under any circumstances. As with many institutions permanent change at the upper level of administration is slow to come about. What is needed is some data on the perceived need and interest for women's studies courses. This study attempted to provide such data.

Method

A telephone poll of perceived need for women's studies courses was administered to a random sample of 91 students, 42 males and 49 females. Subjects were chosen randomly from the University phone book. Interviewers read each question over the phone and asked the student to respond as agree, neutral or disagree to each item. All interviewers were trained to gather data in a standardized manner. Results were then tabulated on the basis of percentages, and ranks.

Results and Discussion

Of the total sample 27% were freshmen, 17% sophomores, 22% juniors, 30% seniors, 4% graduate students. Three percent were registered in the College of Agriculture, 44% in Arts and Sciences, 20% in Business and Public Administration (BPA), 21% in Education and 5% in Engineering. The remaining 7% represented several different colleges.

Table 1 shows the percent responses to eight of the items by sex, class, and college. Table 2 shows the relative ranking of seven different women's courses by sex, class, and college.

Responses to a women's studies curriculum were generally quite favorable. 86% of students sampled disagreed with the statement: "There is no need for courses on women at this university". 83% of males and 88% of females disagreed with the above statement. Respondents of all classes and of all colleges responded overwhelmingly in disagreement with the statement, with percent disagreeing ranging from 100% (Juniors and Agriculture students) to 72% (Buisness and Public Administration students). Additionally 57% of the students surveyed would like to take a course on women if it were offered. While as might be expected, more females (73%) than males (38%) said they would

take such a course. Generally large numbers of students from all classes would be interested in taking courses on women ranging from a high of 68% of freshmen to a low of 31% of sophomores. This low can be explained by the fact that 30% of the sophomores were in the Colleges of Engineering and Business and Public Administration, who were least interested in taking a course on women (20% and 56% respectively). In addition no students in the College of Agriculture were interested in taking such a course, but 65% of the Arts and Sciences students and 53% of the Education students were interested.

The consensus of opinion generally runs toward allowing a major in women's studies (54% of the total disagree that it is a bad idea) and against allowing a separate department of women's studies (58% against the idea). On the other hand, 59% agree that courses on women within individual departments would be a good idea.

These student opinions on the structure of a women's studies curriculum should be considered in any discussion of the establishment of said curriculum along with the often advanced arguments. These are frequently that the quality of staff attracted to such a unidimensional department as a women's studies department, would be less than could be expected of staff members of departments which incorporate a women's studies course into their departmental curriculum. In fact it may very well be that a psychologist, or a historian, or a scientist who devotes him/herself to women's studies might well lose contact with his/her own field if he/she were placed in a women's studies department. On the other hand, this model has worked quite well in many universities where a black studies department has been developed.

In addition, it might benefit students more if a course on women were not taken out of the context of its field of study. For instance, it would

be more beneficial to take a course in the psychology of women where psychological theories using inherently masculine approaches to the feminine personality were critiqued rather than divorcing the course from the context of psychology.

There is general agreement that black studies is a good addition to the university (74% agree) and both fields of studies (blacks and women) are generally important (52%). These questions were included to test the often-mentioned parallel between the situations of blacks and women.

It is quite interesting to see what women's studies courses students feel are needed and which ones they would take if available. Most often mentioned as needed in descending order were: Sociology of Women, Psychology of Women, Sex and Politics, Biology of Women, Women in Literature, History of Women and Women in Education. It is interesting to note that females were more interested in the psychology of women than the sociology of women, whereas for males the reverse was true.

There is no doubt from the results of this survey, that steps ought to be taken at the University of Maryland to implement a women's studies curriculum. Students surveyed were overwhelmingly in favor of such an undertaking. There are large numbers of faculty members interested and willing to teach courses in some area relevant to their interests and to women's studies. Introducing such a program would involve little financial expenditure other than financing a coordinator for the program. It could easily be done, and should be, but will it?

References

Chronicle of Higher Education, September 25, 1972, p. 9.

Truex, D. Focus on feminine ferment. Journal of College Student Personnel, 1970, 11, 323-221.

Table 1

Percent Responses to Items by Sex, Class and College*

	Item							
	I Would Take a Course on Women		Major in Women's Studies - Bad Idea		Should be Women's Studies Department		Black Studies Department - Good Idea	
	% Agree	% Disagree	% Agree	% Disagree	% Agree	% Disagree	% Agree	% Disagree
All Students	57	29	24	54	17	58	74	15
Women	73	16	22	53	16	57	76	18
Men	[illegible]	43	26	55	19	60	71	14
Freshmen	68	20	20	48	16	48	76	12
Sophomores	31	31	--	69	15	69	69	--
Juniors	55	30	25	60	20	45	75	5
Seniors	67	26	33	48	22	67	78	11
Agriculture	--	67	33	33	--	33	100	--
Arts & Sciences	65	23	18	65	30	50	80	10
Bus. & Pub. Admin.	56	33	33	50	11	67	67	11
Education	53	26	37	37	11	68	58	16
Engineering	20	60	20	20	--	80	80	--

* Percentages do not add up to 100 due to exclusion of the "neutral" category

Table 1 (cont'd.)

Percent Responses to Items by Sex, Class and College*

	Item							
	Black Studies and Women's Studies Not Equally Important		Women's Courses Should Be in Individual Departments		There Are Courses on Women Now		There is No Need for Courses on Women	
	% Agree	% Disagree	% Agree	% Disagree	% Agree	% Disagree	% Agree	% Disagree
All Students	31	52	59	15	12	44	5	86
Women	33	53	61	18	16	49	8	88
Men	29	50	57	12	7	38	2	83
Freshmen	32	48	40	24	8	64	12	80
Sophomores	38	46	46	23	15	15	8	85
Juniors	15	65	70	10	20	40	--	100
Seniors	37	48	67	11	7	52	4	78
Agriculture	--	67	33	--	33	33	--	100
Arts & Sciences	25	58	53	23	13	48	5	90
Bus. & Pub. Admin.	39	44	61	6	--	61	--	72
Education	26	53	63	16	16	32	11	89
Engineering	60	20	80	--	20	20	20	80

* Percentages do not add up to 100 due to exclusion of the "neutral" category

Table 2

Rank Orders* of Courses on Women Students Would Take by Sex, Class and College

COURSE	All Stud.	Women	Men	Fr.	Soph.	Jr.	Sr.	Agric.	Arts & Sci.	Bus. & Pub. Admin.	Educ.	Engr.
Sociology	1	2	[illegible]	1	2	2	2	7	1	3	2	7
Psychology	2	1	[illegible]	2	3	1	1	4	3	1	1	5
Sex and Politics	3	3	3	3	1	3	3	3	2	2	5	1
Biology	4	4	4	4	4	6	4	1	5	4	4	6
Women in Literature	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	2	4	7	6	2
History	6	6	6	7	6	7	6	5	6	5	7	4
Women in Education	7	7	7	6	7	4	7	6	7	6	3	3

* 1=most often would take, 7=least often would take